

**PRESS RELEASE:**

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**PRESS TOUR:**

Wednesday, April 24, 2019, 10:00 am

**EXHIBITION OPENING:**

Wednesday, April 24, 2019, 7:00 pm

**DURATION:**

April 25 – September 1, 2019

**CURATOR:**

Johann Feilacher

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## In the Web of the All-Round Gugging Artist August Walla

*Fascinating, eclectic, flamboyant: August Walla (June 22, 1936 – June 7, 2001) was one of the most interesting artistic personalities in Gugging. Walla's departure point was his self-created, private mythological universe with a multifarious pantheon of gods and an own language, emblems, and symbols. The vastness of Walla's artistic content is complemented by the diversity of media the artist employed. Besides paintings and drawings, there are numerous works in textiles, photography, and written word, which form an indispensable part of August Walla's oeuvre and make him one of the most versatile artists of the twentieth century, says curator Johann Feilacher. From April 25, 2019 museum gugging puts the textiles, photography, and texts of this relentless Gugging Artist in the limelight.*

August Walla counts amongst the most versatile artists of the twentieth century and is, without doubt, one of the most important Austrian artists after 1945. The departure point for his work is a fascinating self-created mythological universe with one theme at its core: death and how to overcome it. Walla played with various media, which he employed in equal measure, in his attempts to capture his world of ideas in images. His impressive oeuvre spans from painting to media art—it is as if the individual works are interconnected by a fine mesh, be it large paintings, murals, graffiti, drawings, texts, sculptures, installations, textiles, art in public space, performance, or photography. In the exhibition at *museum gugging* curator Johann Feilacher places the focus on the textile works, photography, and written word of the artist for the first time and presents his findings from the Gugging archives.



August Walla, *Symbol Hell*, undated, © Art Brut KG

### Walla's Words

August Walla's creative work reflects an intensive exploration into written language and his passion for words from foreign languages. Walla's private and secret language, which he called a "Weltallendfremdsprache" [universe-end-language], consists of word creations composed from foreign languages and German words. He worked with repetitions of individual words or letters, wrote Russian-Cyrillic text as if it was taken from the Latin alphabet, loved abbreviations like KPÖ (Communist Party of Austria), NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party), or DDSG (Danube Steamboat Association). Author Gisela Steinlechner writes: "The niche existence that led August Walla to become a social outsider was the departure and counterpoint of his inexhaustible flow of words, which he covered every imaginable surface with: sheet metal and fire screens, streets and trees, cooking pots, inside and outside walls of houses, wooden boards, cardboard, typing paper, canvases, notebooks, postcards, insides of dust covers, back sides of chocolate wrappers and obituaries, pharmaceutical notepads, blank spaces in novels and textbooks. Through writing Walla declared everything as his territory, he marked his surroundings and cashed it in."<sup>1</sup>

### Photography – Walla's Bodies, Walla's World

August Walla evoked his mythical-magical world with his entire body. Walla himself and his rooms with objects are a part of his compositions. Aloisia Walla, mother and ally of the artist, was often the one who documented these actions photographically. Through the photographic practice of Walla and his mother Walla's works became "eternalised" on another level, this time on photo paper. Beyond mere photographic documentation, Walla created an extensive and highly diverse photographic oeuvre since the end of the 1960s:

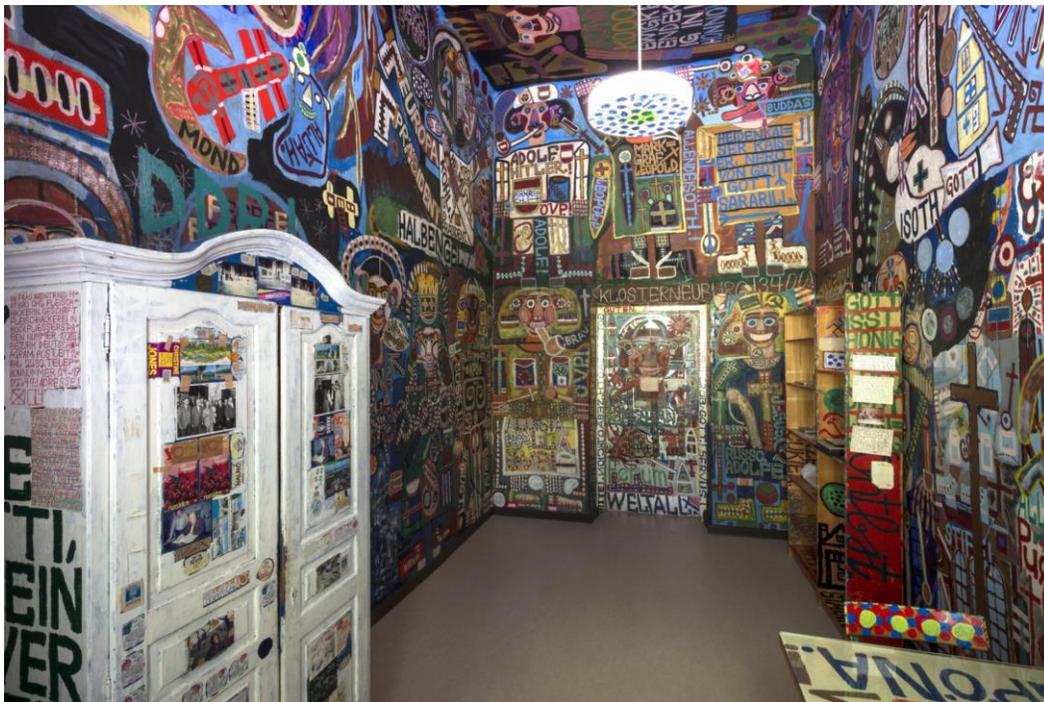


August Walla, photograph, undated

<sup>1</sup> Gisela Steinlechner, "mit feder und teufelschreibmaschine. Portrait august walla als schreiber," in *weltallende*, vol. 4, ed. Johann Feilacher (St. Pölten: Residenz, 2012), 6f. Translated for this publication.

landscapes, interiors, working material. Walla arranged his photographic motifs—there is often a strong geometrical order within the image. The objects in the photos are found and collected objects from which he then created signboards, wooden boxes, flags, and many other things, which represent a part of his sculptural works.

### Walla's Life – National Socialism, Psychiatry, and Life in the Wetlands



August Walla's room in the House of Artists, Gugging © Pez Hejduk

The *Gugging Artist* August Walla (June 22, 1936 – June 7, 2001) was raised by his mother Aloisia (1896–1993) and his grandmother Rosina Walla (1867–1942); he had next to no contact with his father Augustin Gutmayer (1876–1960). A momentous and dramatic event for Walla apparently was the death of his grandmother, who passed away when he was six years old. The death of his grandmother marks the beginning of August Walla's private mythology, the main theme of which is overcoming death.

August Walla attended kindergarten and elementary school in Klosterneuburg. Due to behavioural disorders, he spent his early years from age seven to nine in institutions—including the notorious “Am Spiegelgrund” children’s clinic, part of the psychiatric hospital Am Steinhof, which went down in history for its euthanasia crimes between 1940 and 1945. Following the Binet test, Walla’s intelligence corresponded with his age, which very likely saved his life. Already at this point in time there were also notes in hospital reports that indirectly referred to the creative drawings by the young August Walla. On February 12, 1945 Walla returned to his mother in Klosterneuburg, where he completed his secondary school education in 1951. Between 1952 and 1975 he had six stays of various durations in the former Maria Gugging Psychiatric Clinic. Walla’s artistic abilities were only recognised later, when Leo Navratil, a psychiatrist in Gugging, discovered his talents in 1970. Walla’s large stylised writing attracted Navratil’s attention. So he asked him to make a drawing whose contents came as a surprise: August Walla not only completed the task of drawing a human, he also revealed his entire underlying philosophy in the broadest form of his artistic expression.

Until 1983 Walla lived together with his mother in different apartments in Klosterneuburg, which also served as surfaces for his artistic output. He shaped his surroundings by externalising his philosophy and complete artistic spectrum on the outside world. This can be seen, for example, in the allotment garden in the wetlands area along the Danube, where the Wallas spent the summer months. The garden was covered with Walla’s inscriptions, emblems, and symbols.

In November 1983 August Walla and his mother moved into what is now the *House of Artists* in Maria Gugging; in 1984 his mother transferred to the geriatric ward of the clinic for nursing care. As in Klosterneuburg, Walla applied his ideas to his surroundings in the *House of Artists*. The first step was to cover his room from floor to ceiling with his symbols, gods, and writing. Between 1987 and 1988 a “second” room was made: Walla painted canvases placed in front of the walls of his room, which were then presented as a “room” in various exhibition venues. In 1984 Walla painted the picture “TEUFEL.GOTT.!” [DEVIL.GOD.!] on the façade of the *House of Artists*. In the same year he made an over six-metre-long ceramic wall with the title “Paradies” [Paradise] by the entrance to the Maria Gugging Psychiatric Clinic, which is now found in front of *museum gugging*. In 1986 he painted a circus wagon for André Heller’s art project “Luna Luna”. Keith Haring, Georg Baselitz, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Salvador Dali, amongst others were involved in this project as well. In 1990, together with the *Gugging Artists*, Walla was awarded the Oskar Kokoschka Prize for achievements in contemporary art.

Following the death of his 97-year-old mother in 1993, there was a transformation in August Walla's creative work. The motifs and contents changed, the mythological themes disappeared, and he pursued subjects of everyday life such as eating. This phase lasted until his death on June 7, 2001.

This exhibition is an invitation to discover the incredibly fascinating and multifaceted oeuvre of the all-round artist August Walla—an invitation to the universe of his "Weltallende" with its gods and devils, symbols, languages, and writings.

*The information in this text originates from Nina Ansperger's article on August Walla in the exhibition catalogue *gehirngefühl. ! kunst aus gugging von 1970 bis zur gegenwart*, eds. Nina Ansperger, Johann Feilacher (Vienna, Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 2018), 328–348 and *august walla. ! weltallende*, ed. Johann Feilacher (Vienna, Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 2012).*

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25.04.2019 – 01.09.2019

## EXHIBITION PROGRAMME:

- |                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Sun, 26.05, 3:00 – 5:00 pm | The Vienna Complaints Choir performs August Walla's texts. Free entrance!   |
| Sun, 02.06, 2:00 – 3:00 pm | public guided tour: "gugging in focus": sattdus and kappar  |
| Tue, 04.06, 2:30 – 4:30 pm | gugging gugelhupf: august walla's border crossings. Conversations about art and culinary delights with Katja Brandes. |
| Sun, 04.08, 2:00 – 3:00 pm | public guided tour: "gugging in focus": walla's world   |

Guided tours to August Walla's room upon prior appointment at *museum gugging*.

## IMAGE DOWNLOAD:

<https://celum.noeku.at/pindownload/login.do?pin=NOQKG>

## CATALOGUE:

Johann Feilacher (ed.), *august walla.! weltallende*, ed. (Vienna, Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 2012). With contributions by Silvie Aigner, Johann Feilacher, Nina Katschnig, Gerhard Roth, Gisela Steinlechner, Helmut Zambo, Margit Zuckriegl; four volumes in slipcase, 750 pages, ca. 1000 images, hard cover, 149 EUR, ISBN: 9783701732753.

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